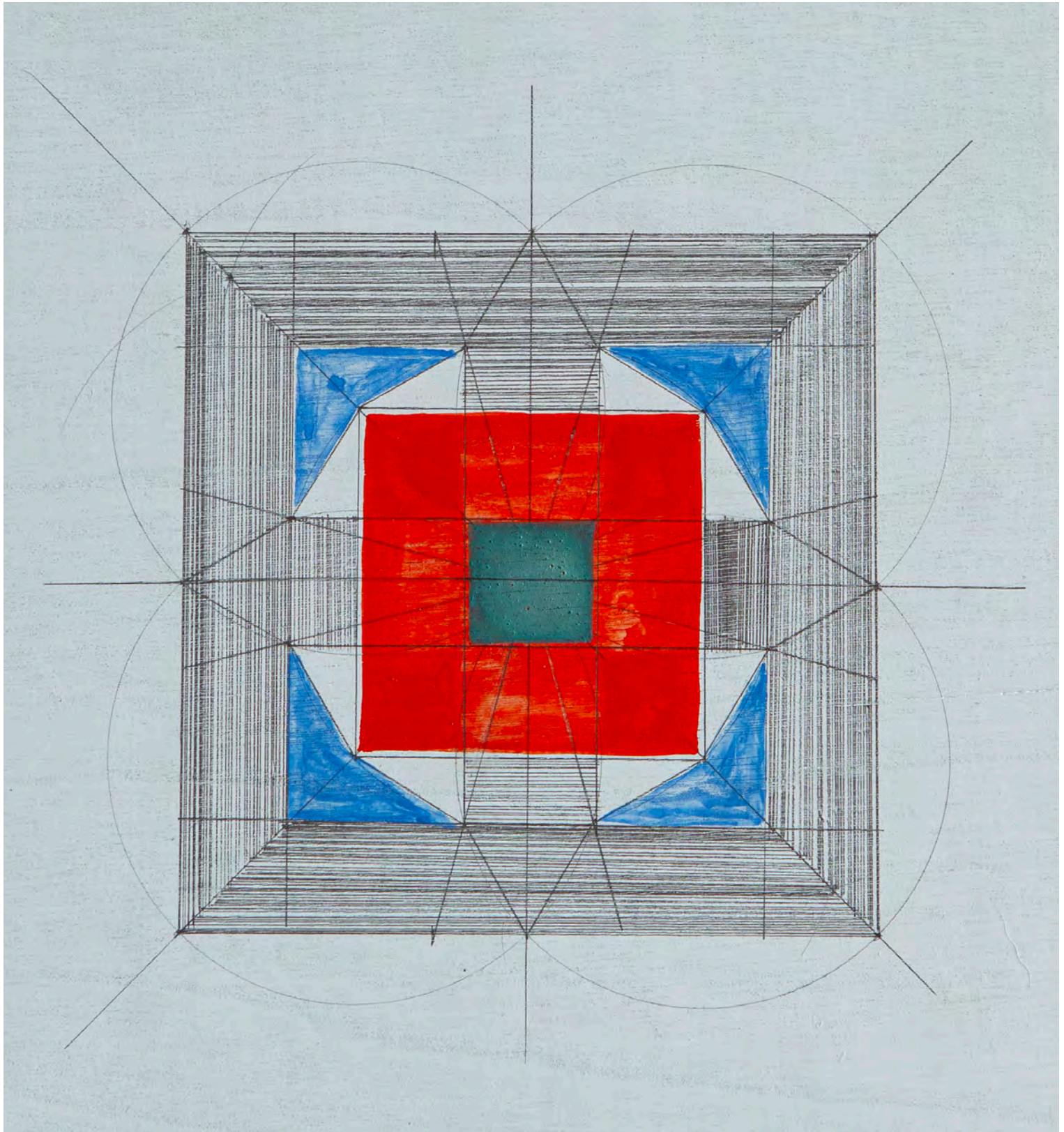


AMINA AHMED
CIRCLE SQUARE
TRIANGLE TURTLE FISH



JHAVERI CONTEMPORARY

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TRIANGLE TURTLE FISH

14 SEPT—21 OCT 2023

Repetitive shapes of colour are ordered across Amina Ahmed's works. At meeting points, their pigments saturate each other. Blues infiltrate red. Greens overlap with oranges. Pink leaks across yellow. A pencil scaffolding, faintly apparent, holds the whole together.

Ahmed's practice is self-defined as 'geometry in nature'. She is alert to the shapes that are inherent to life and structure our physical reality. 'In my art I access the patterns, the rhythms, and the pulse of life that I believe permeates all living things', she explains. Her educational background in Islamic arts has shaped this sensitivity to geometry and led her to find in nature her art.

'Patterns are universal, they are rooted in nature, in water', she says. And as much as water is fundamental for life, so too for Ahmed is her creative practice. Her making is her 'grip on reality (and) reconnection to the origin'. As such, her mark making, while recognisably related to sacred geometry, bears the influence of her ancestors who spanned cultures and ethnicities from present day Uzbekistan, Egypt to India. The family's material culture guide her works. The fabrics her co-mother, Noor Jahan, collected from Kutch and Pakistan are recounted in her designs and colour palette. The afternoons spent in her childhood home, with her birth mother Zuleikha, where women gathered to sew and quilt are felt in her process and choice of media.

The exhibition opens with a video trained on the hands of Ahmed's mother Zuleikha. She prepares thread, knots it through velvet and a Congolese kitenge textile while explaining her technique. The final product, a padded and plump quilt, is ceremoniously laid on the floor in the gallery. Nearby, Ahmed's site-specific drawings evoke the movement, dexterity, and preoccupation of Zuleikha's hands.

In *Time - Staircase of my Spine* Ahmed's geometry articulates itself through an arrangement of pins around which a continuous piece of thread is secured. The pins pierce the gallery wall and run in a vertical column through a backdrop of graphite circles and four pressed paper pulp tablets. The intricate method is a resurrection of her mother's needle work and the times Ahmed spent watching her stitch fabrics into clothes. But where in sewing the pins are redundant in the final item here they are integral to the image. Only lightly set into the plaster by their tip, their body, along with the whisp of thread, create fine shadow lines.

Maternal creativity permeates the show. Embroideries made by her are bound together in book form with Ahmed's embossed drawings. Shapes are painted on velvet, bordered with a green fabric acquired by her mother in Congo and run over with a kantha stitch. There have been times Ahmed has used dressmaking paper. On a table in the gallery, she exposes her 'thinking note books' and the compilations of images and salient words that feed into her final images.

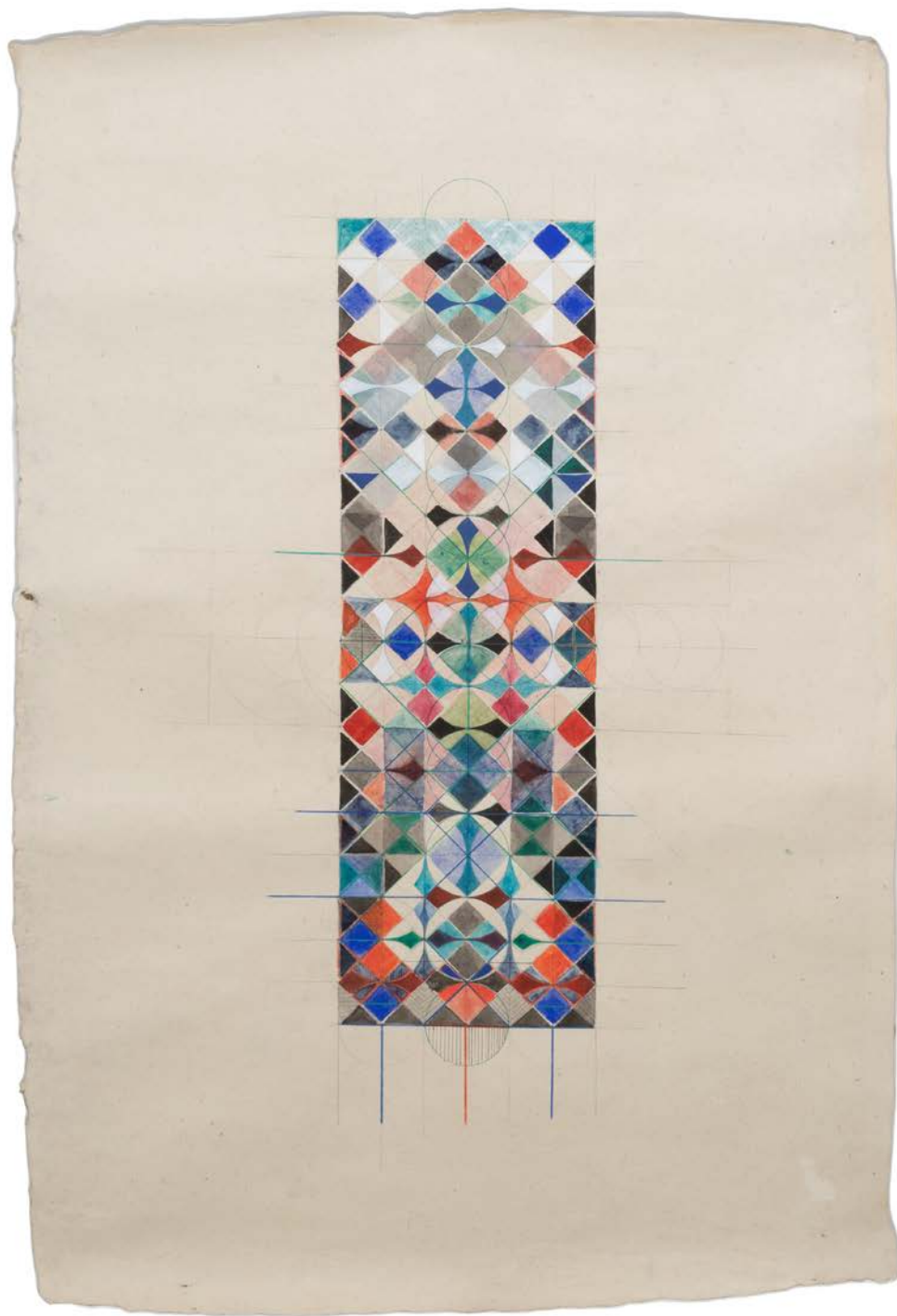
Each of Ahmed's works is rhythmic and although the exhibition spans from 1989 to 2023, there is resonance, as if pieces some 34

years apart anticipated each other. Residing in this formal unity is also a subtle response to issues of violence and oppression. Ahmed is active in the fight for human rights and her exploration of beauty is, in part, motivated by her belief in its transformative powers. She regards beauty as a necessity and core to the universal connection that underpins her understanding of the world. Joan Kee writes, 'Geometry compels us to ask what lines might be drawn or undrawn' and for Ahmed in shapes she finds a language that draws people, cultures, and places closer.

AMINA AHMED



Time and Space, 2006
Coloured pencils on paper
126.5 x 97.5 cm
49.8 x 38.1 in



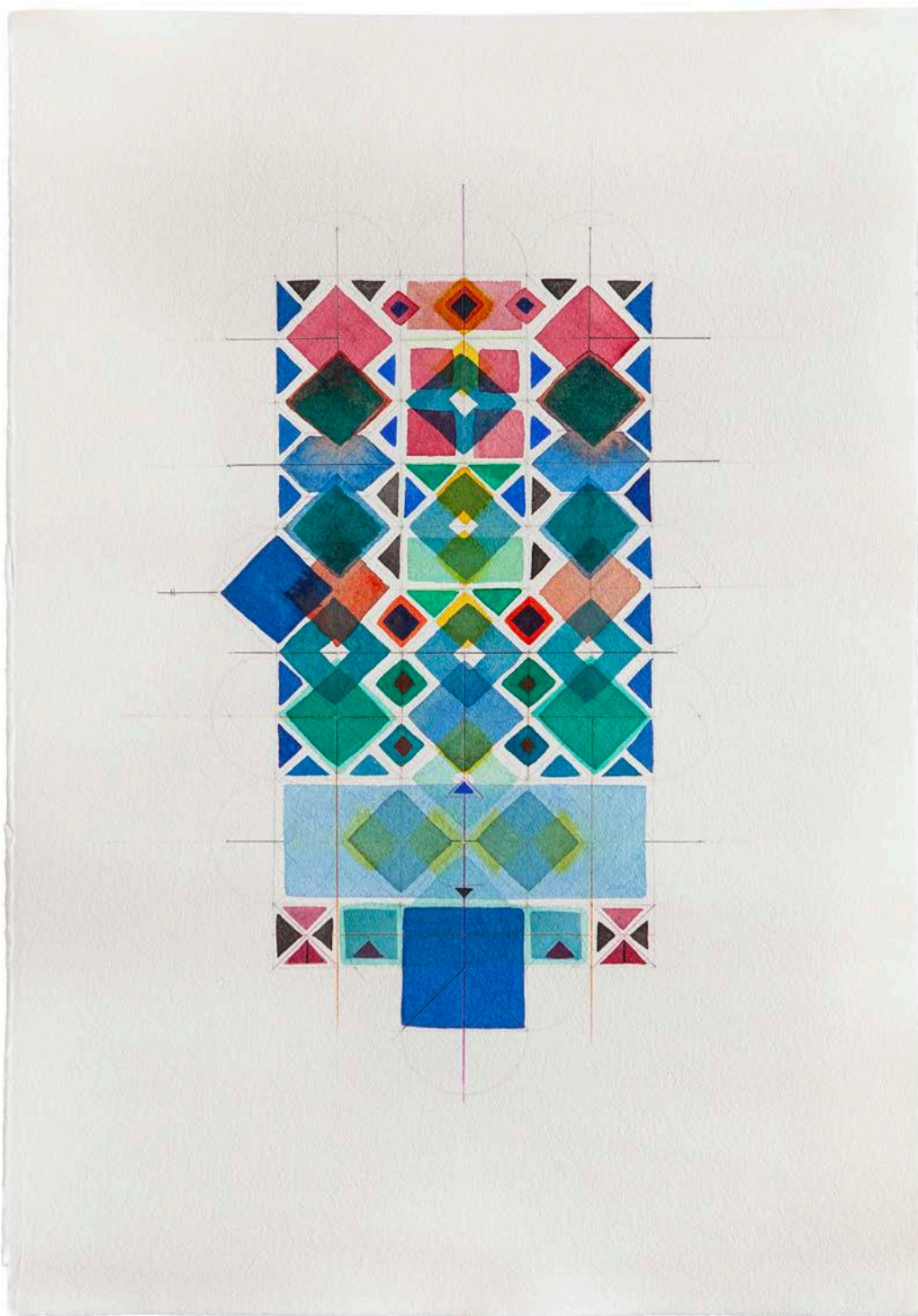
Ala Bali, 2021
Pigment and ink on paper
79 x 53.5 cm
31.1 x 21 in

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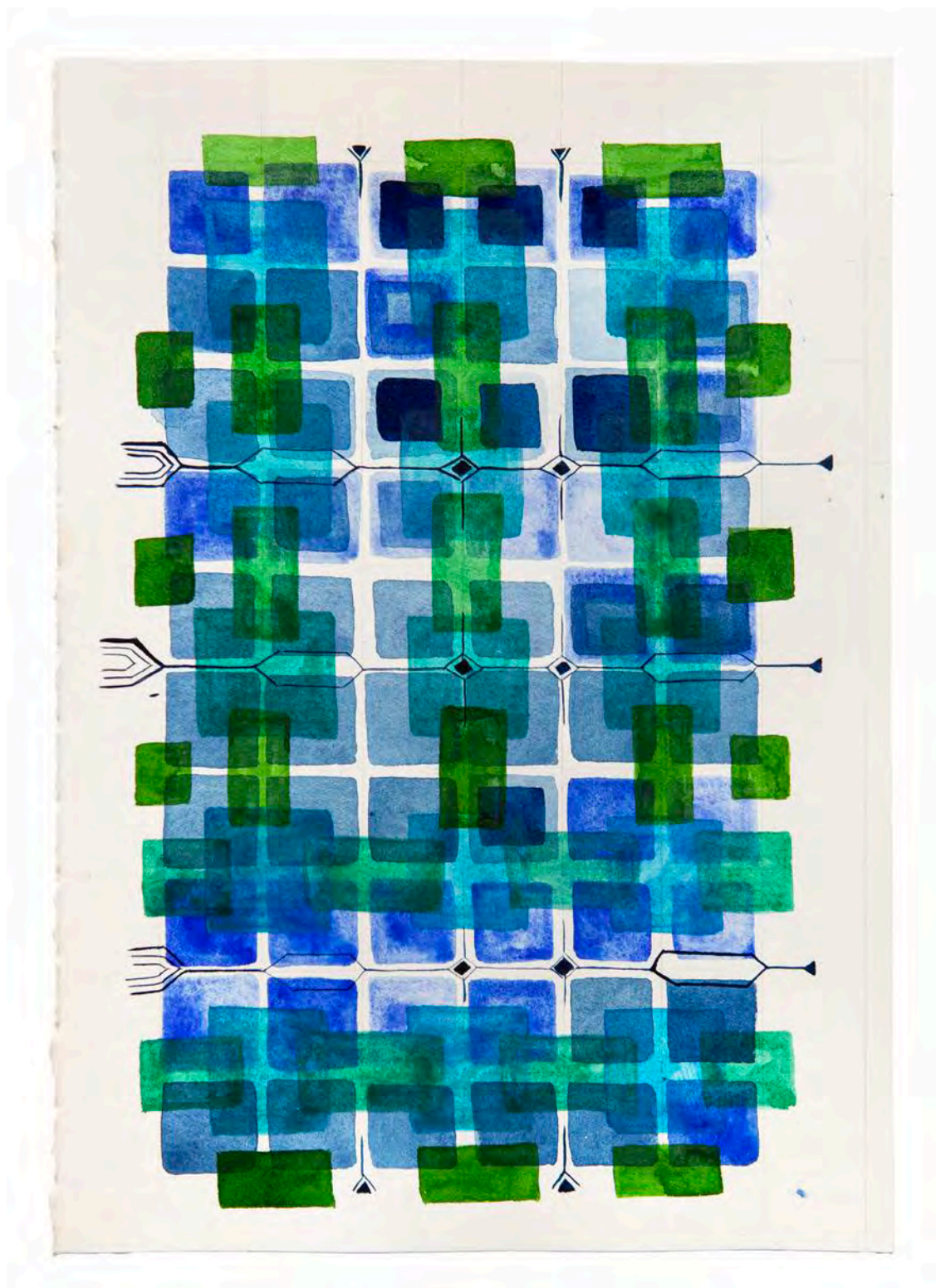
For the Women that use Thread, 2019
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
76.2 x 56.4 cm
30 x 22.3 in

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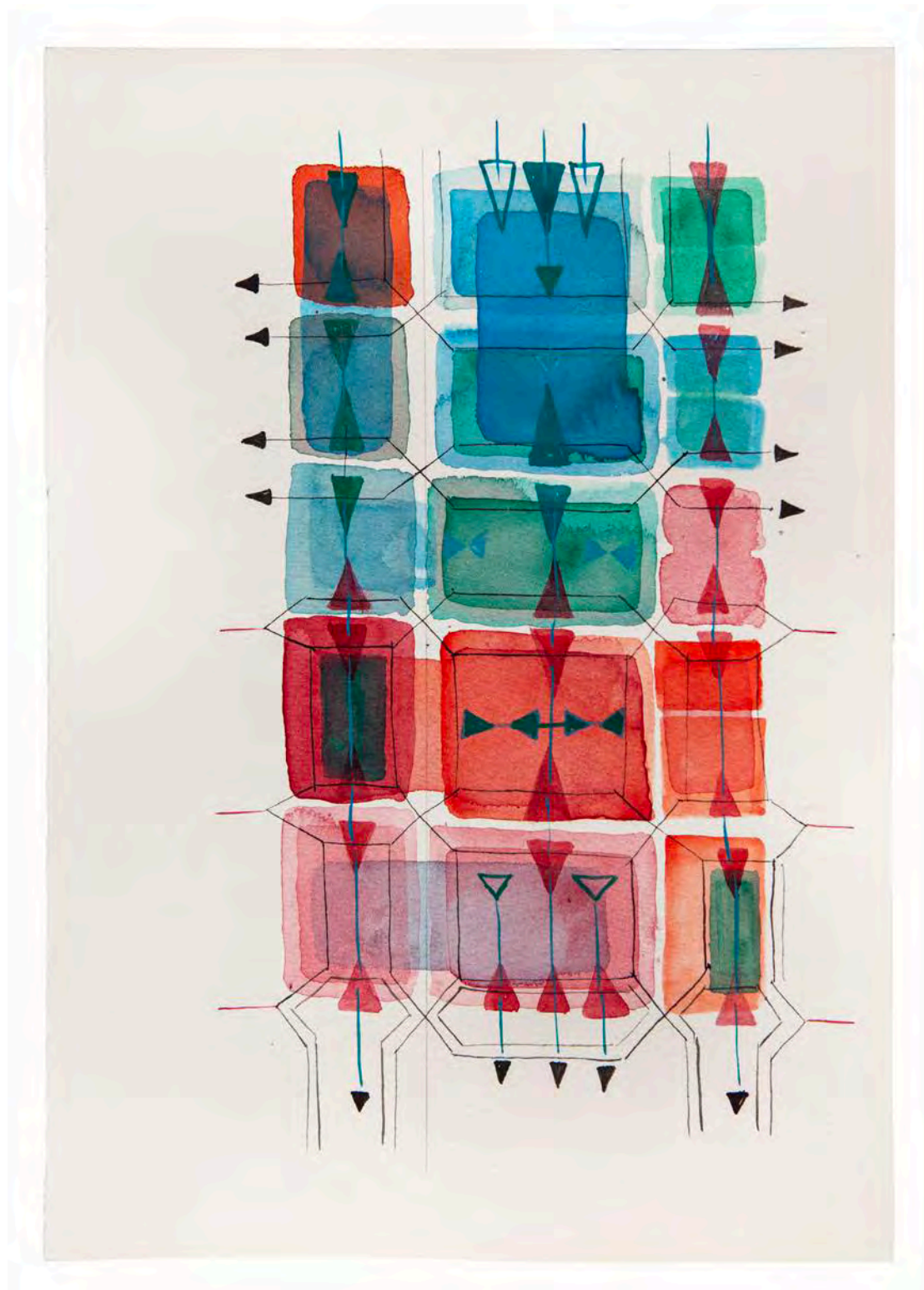
Baloch, 2019
Graphite, colour pencils, watercolour, and gum
tempera on paper
55.8 x 39.3 cm
22 x 15.5 in

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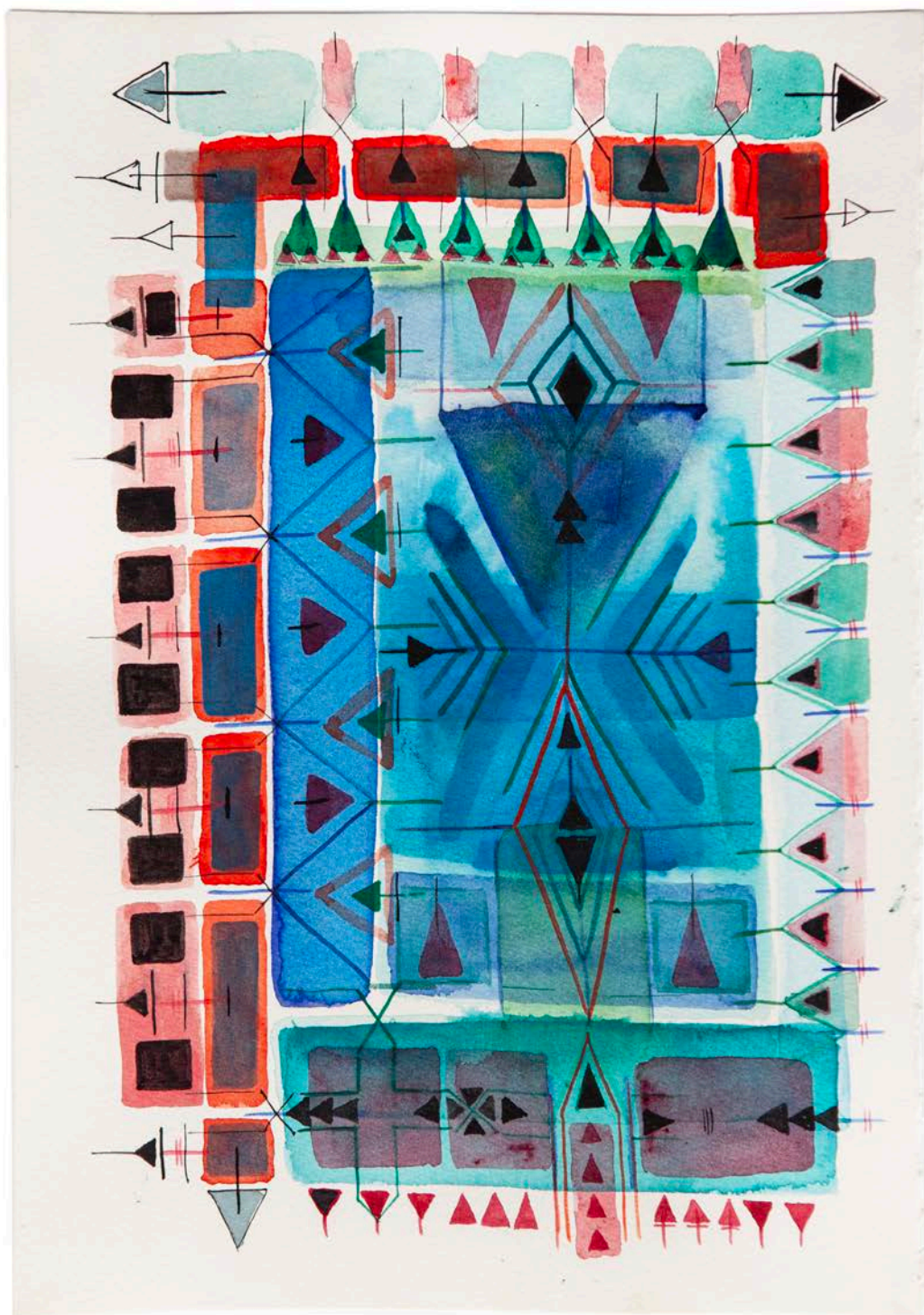
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

AMINA AHMED



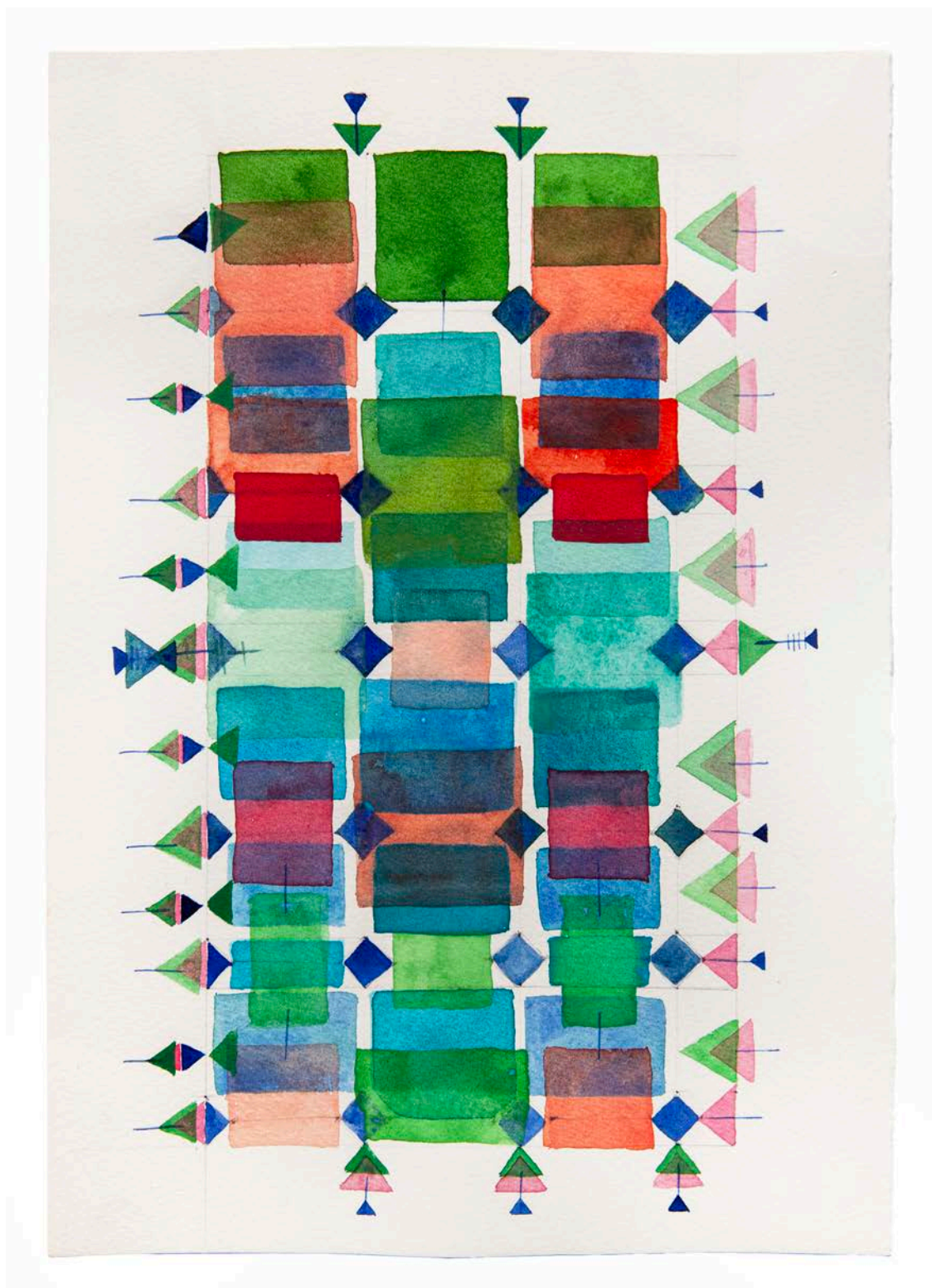
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29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

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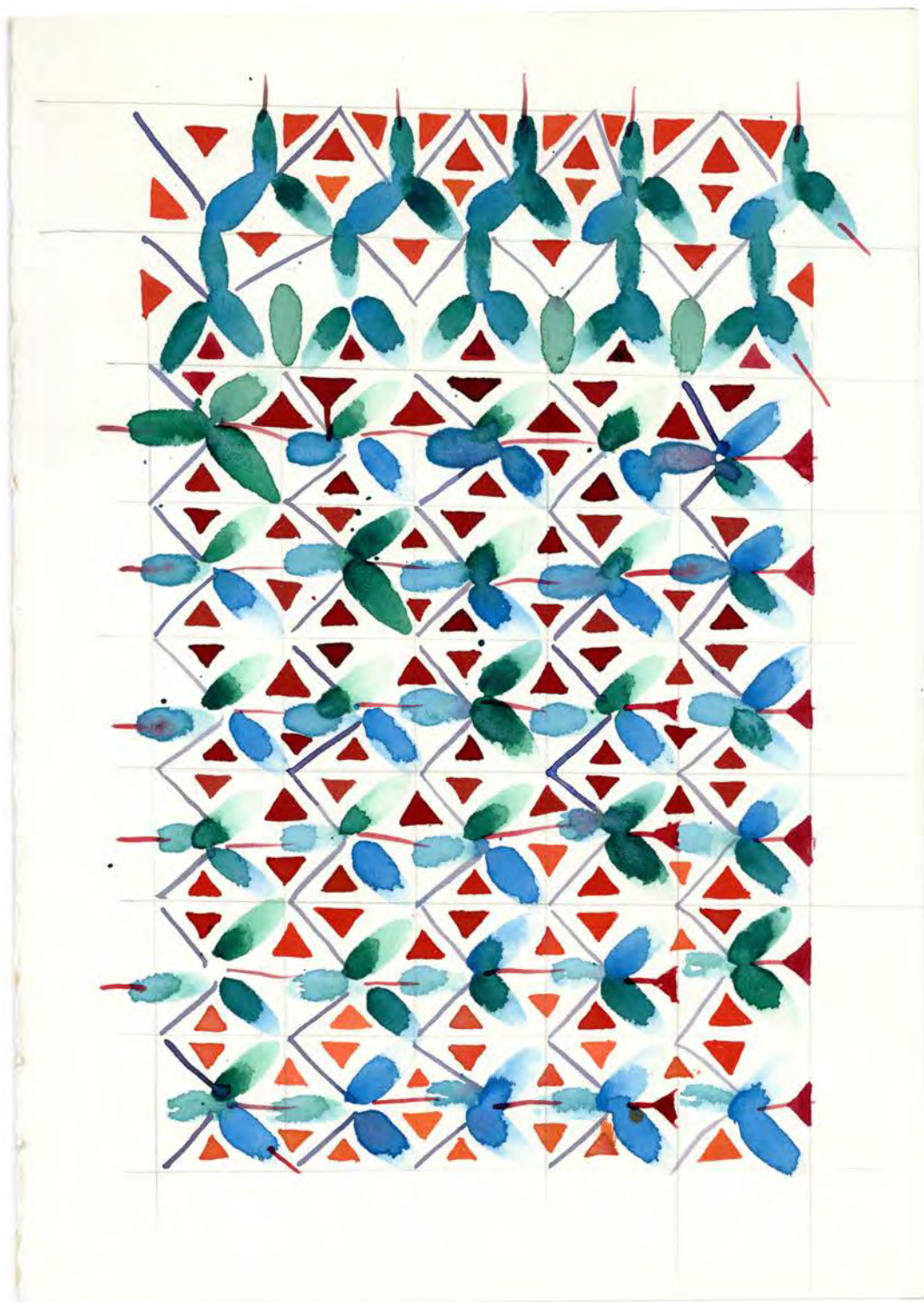
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

AMINA AHMED



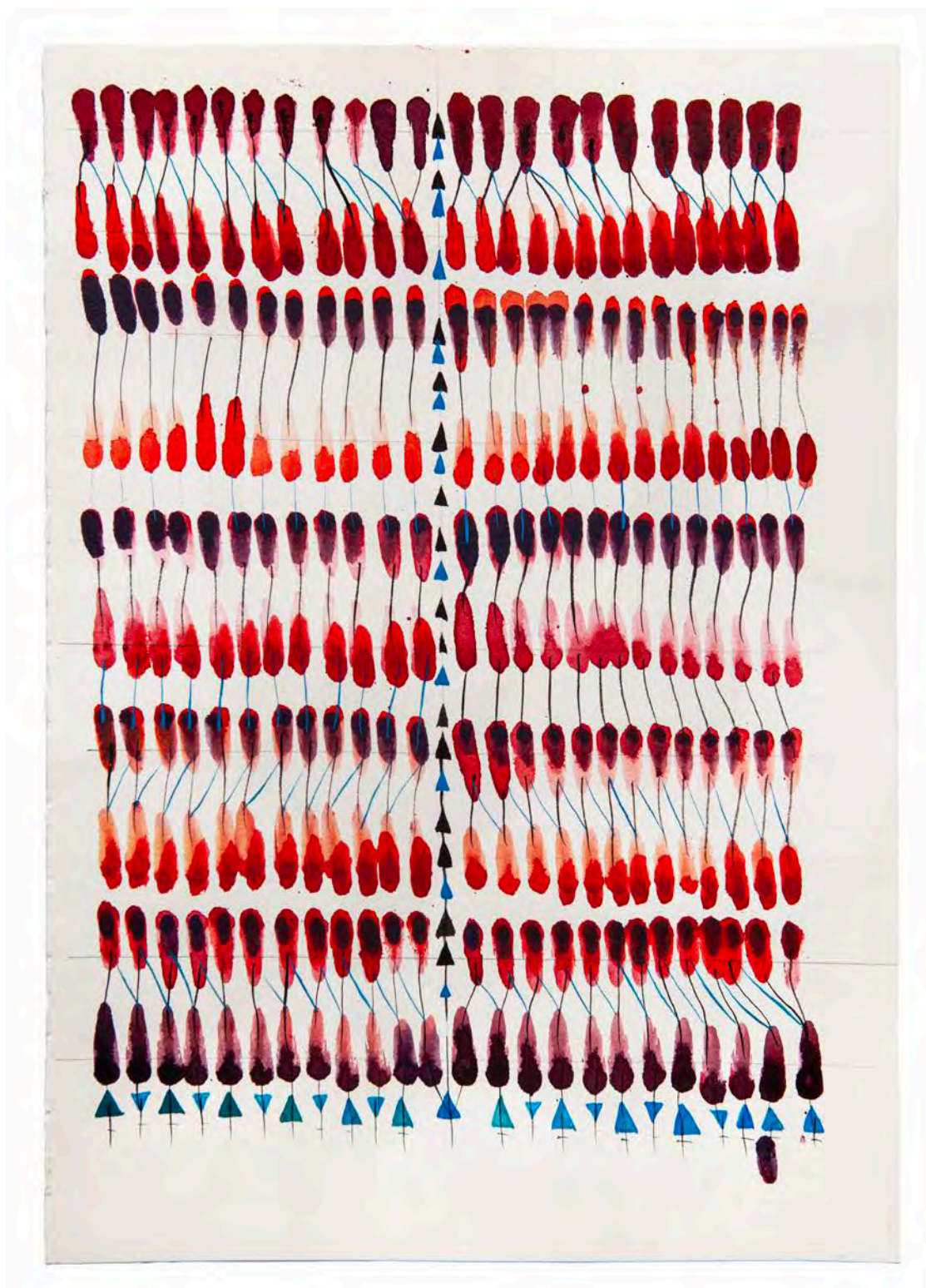
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

AMINA AHMED



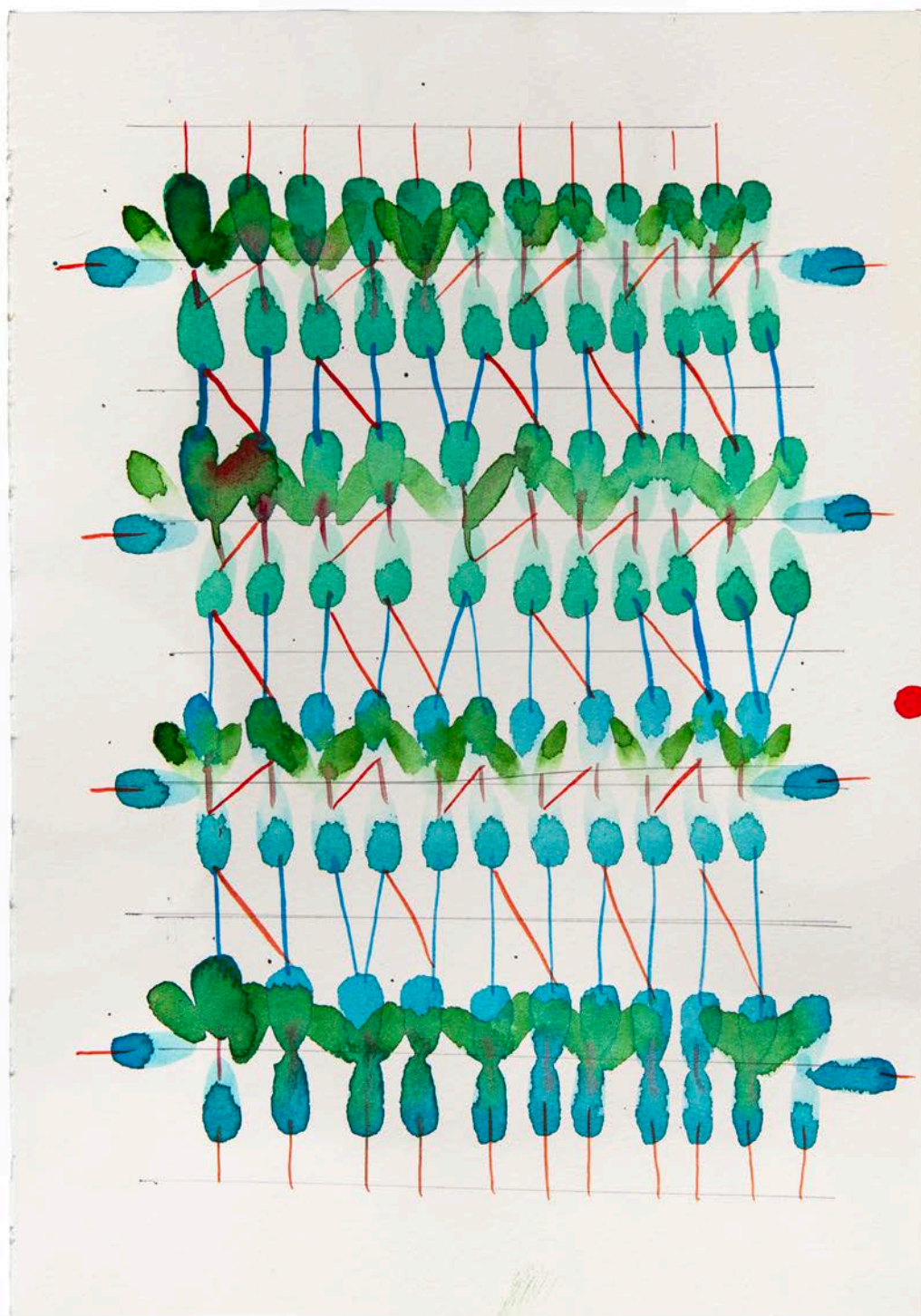
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

AMINA AHMED



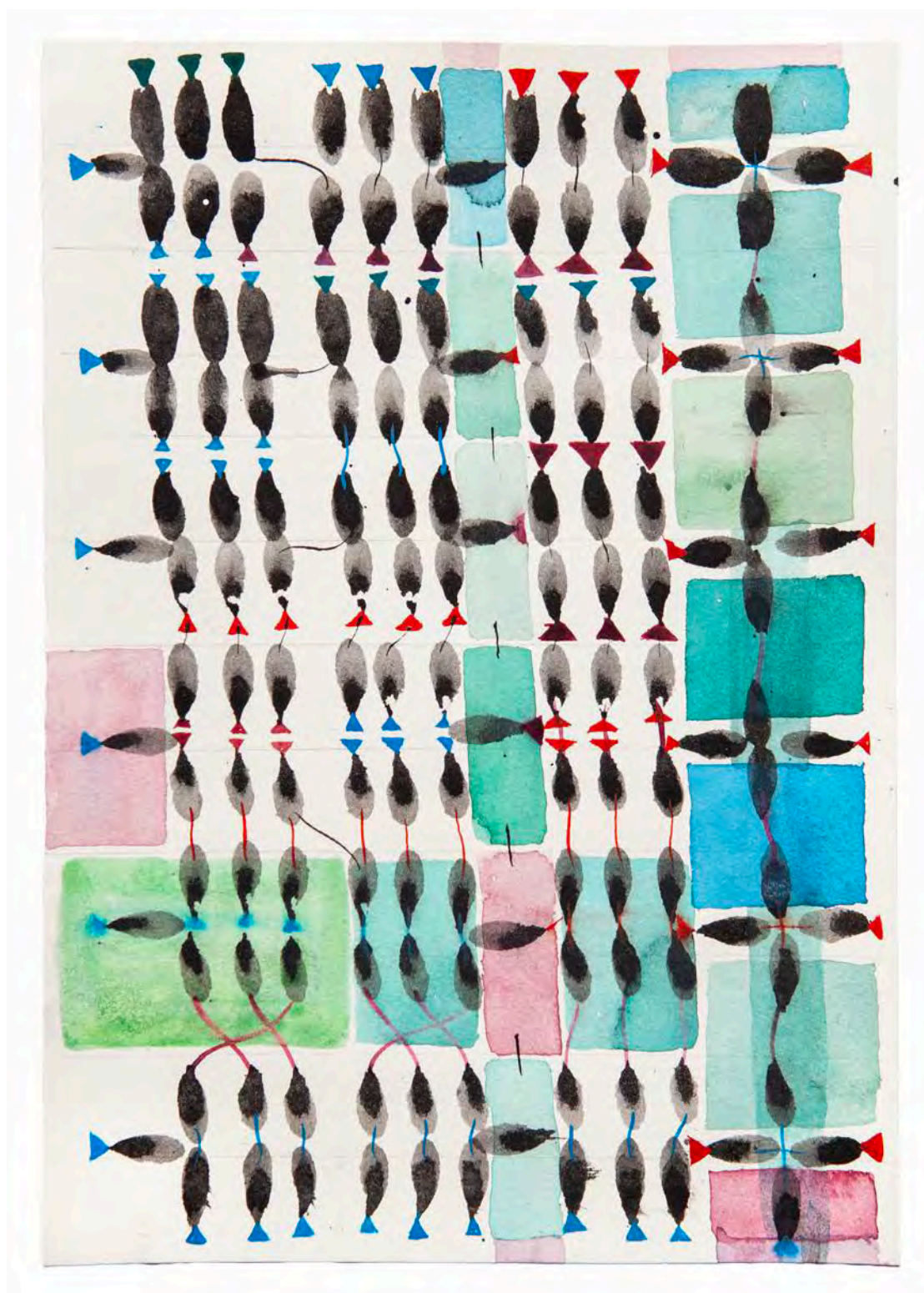
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

AMINA AHMED



Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

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Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

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Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera, graphite, and ink on paper
29.5 x 20.6 cm
11.6 x 8.1 in

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Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2022
Watercolour on paper
25.4 x 17.1 cm
10 x 6.75 in

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Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2022
Watercolour on paper
25.4 x 17.1 cm
10 x 6.75 in

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Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2022
Watercolour on paper
25.4 x 17.1 cm
10 x 6.75 in

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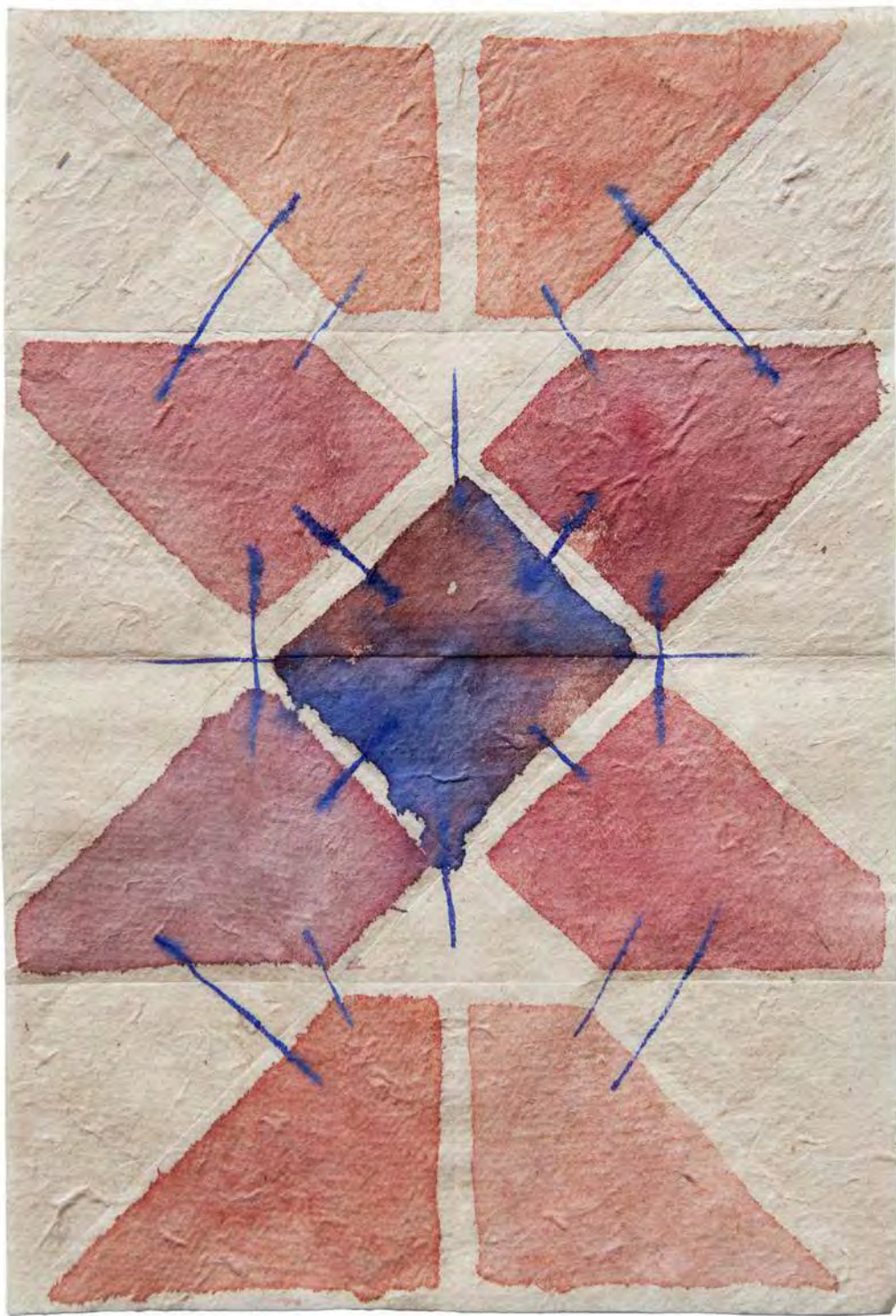
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2022
Watercolour on paper
25.4 x 17.1 cm
10 x 6.75 in

AMINA AHMED



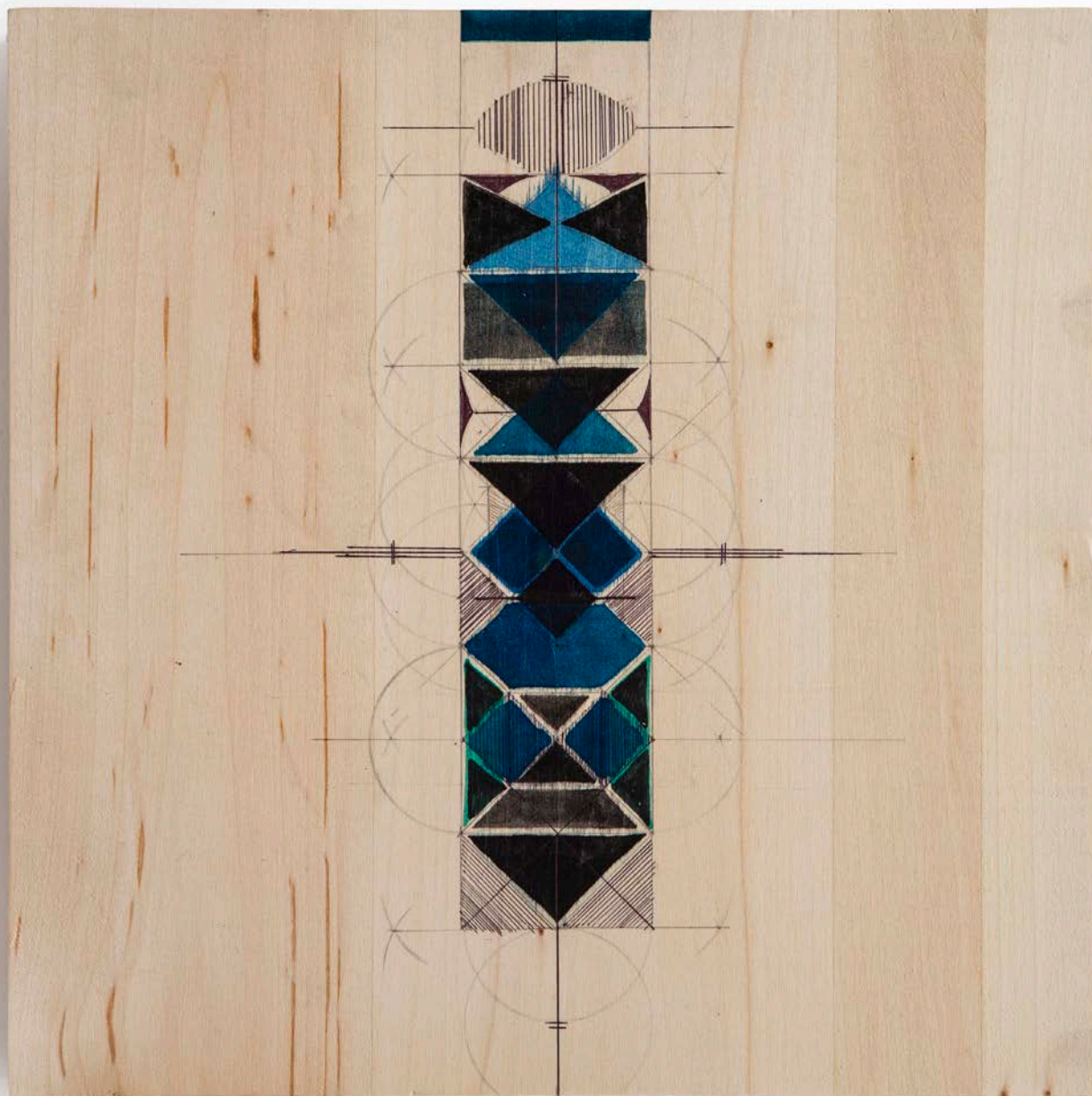
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2022
Watercolour on paper
25.4 x 17.1 cm
10 x 6.75 in

AMINA AHMED



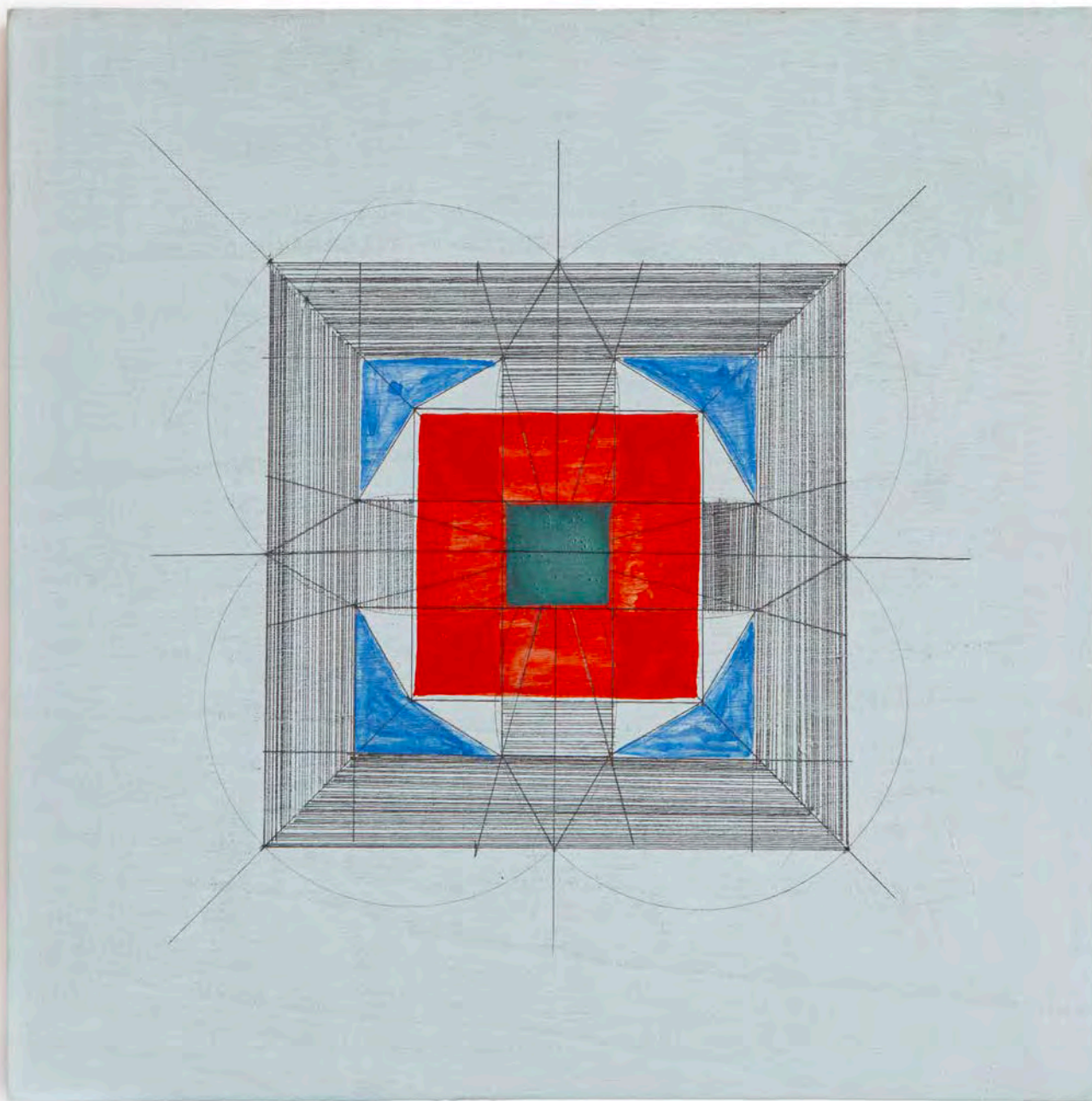
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2022
Watercolour on paper
25.4 x 17.1 cm
10 x 6.75 in

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Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2021
Gum tempera and graphite on wood
30.4 x 30.4 x 4.5 cm
12 x 12 x 2 in

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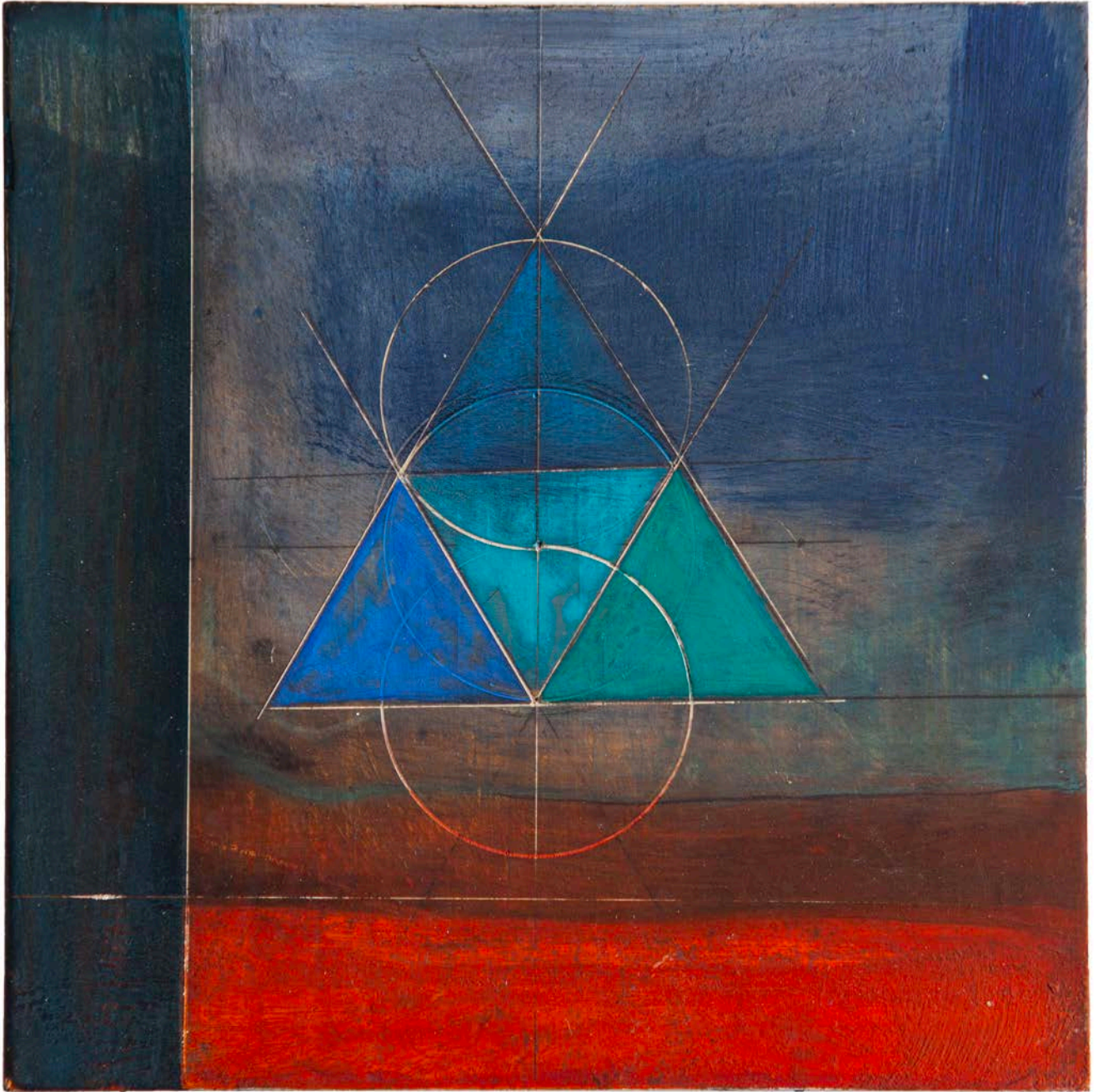
Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2021
Gum tempera and graphite on wood
20.3 x 20.3 x 2 cm
8 x 8 x 0.7 in

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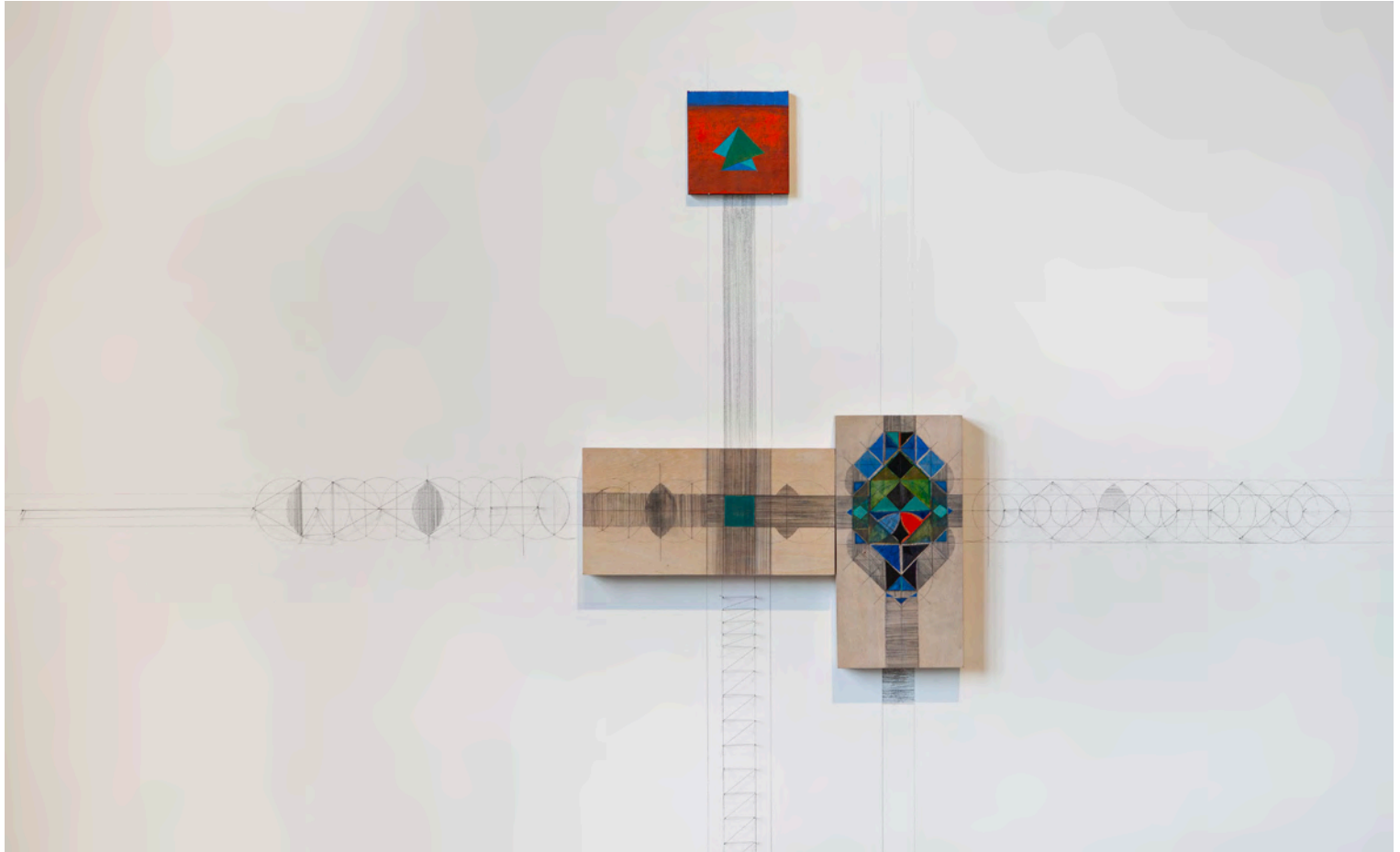
The Black Stone, 1996
Egg tempera on gesso on wood
14.8 x 14.8 x 1.2 cm
5.8 x 5.8 x 0.4 in

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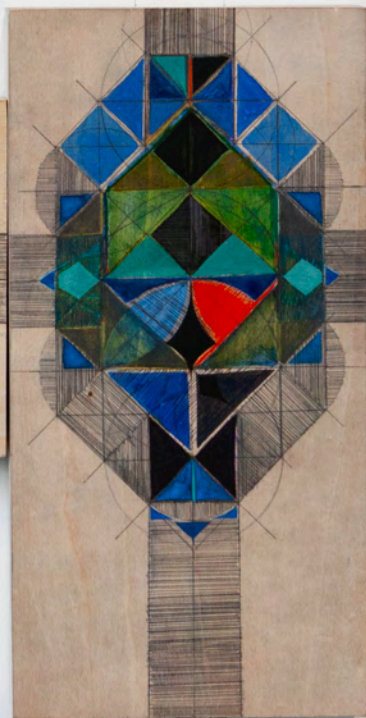
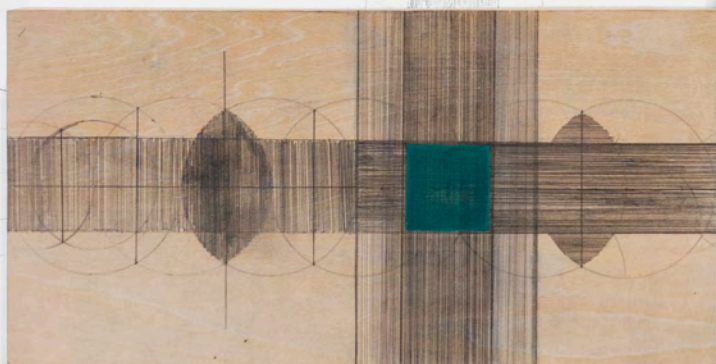


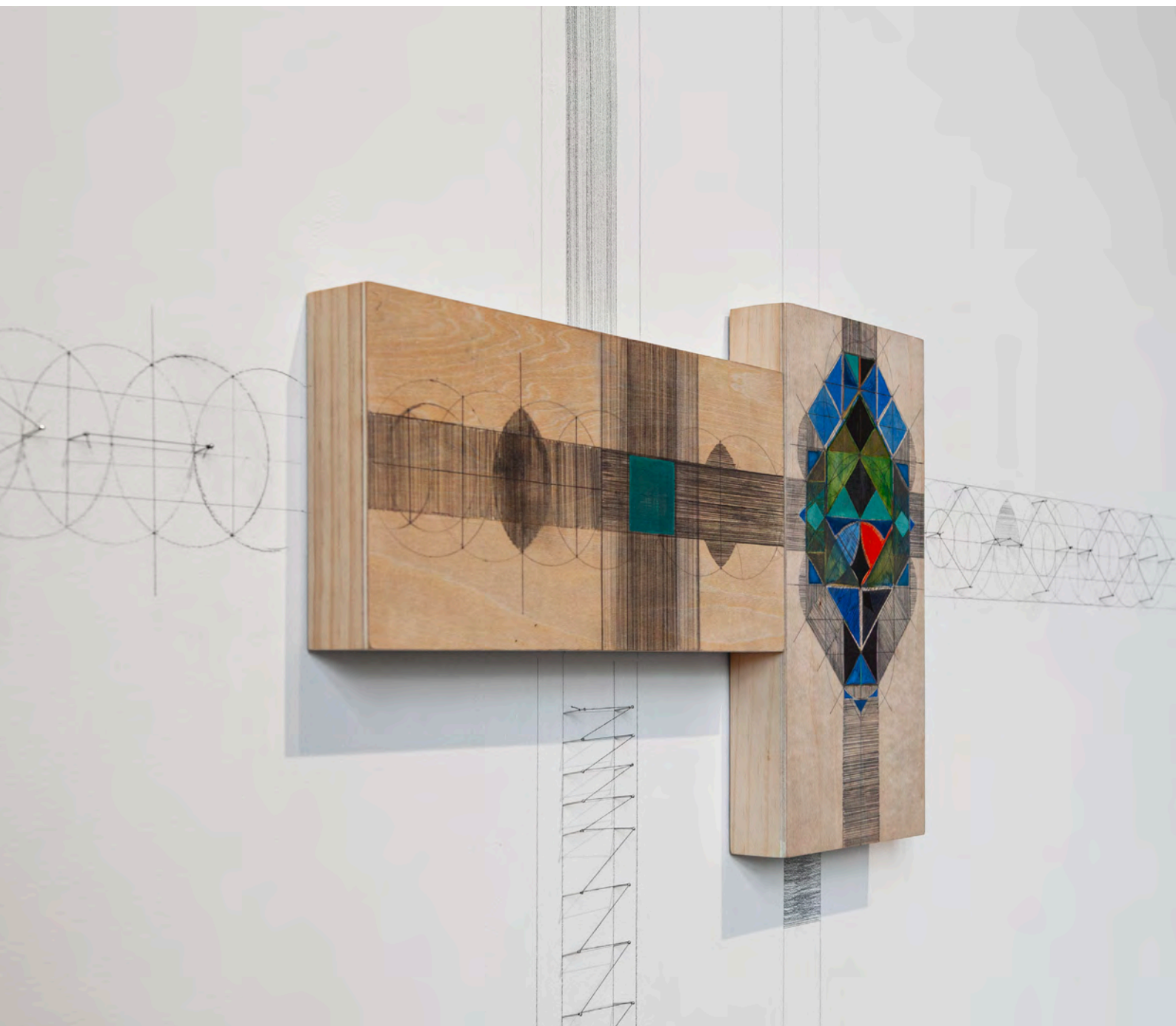
Triangle Tent, 1996
Egg tempera on gesso on wood
14.8 x 14.8 x 1.2 cm
5.8 x 5.8 x 0.4 in

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Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish, 2023
Gum tempera and graphite on wood; egg
tempera on gesso on wood; pins, cotton thread,
and graphite
Site-specific drawing





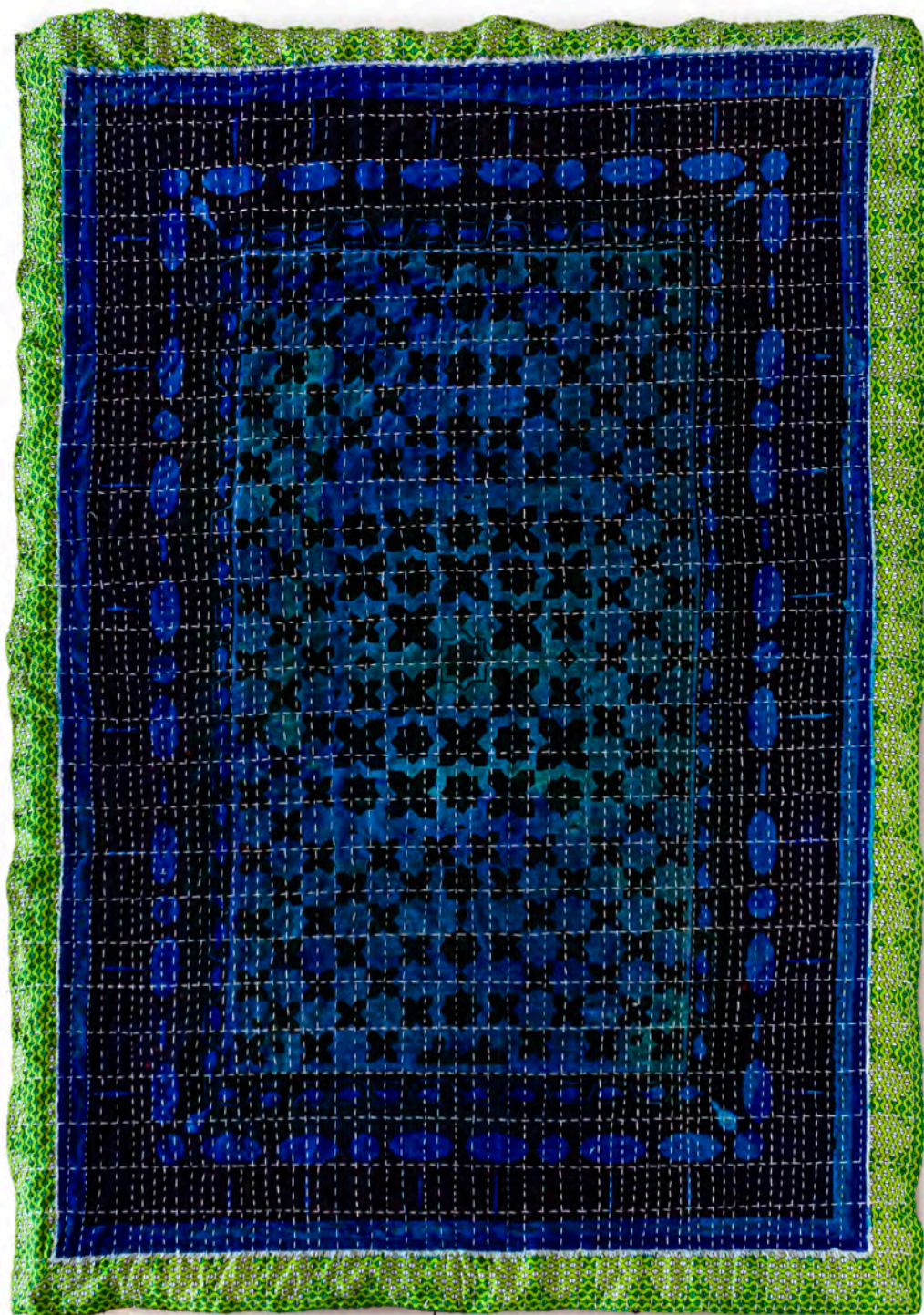


Time – Staircase of my Spine, 2023
Pins, paper pulp, cotton thread, and graphite
Site-specific drawing



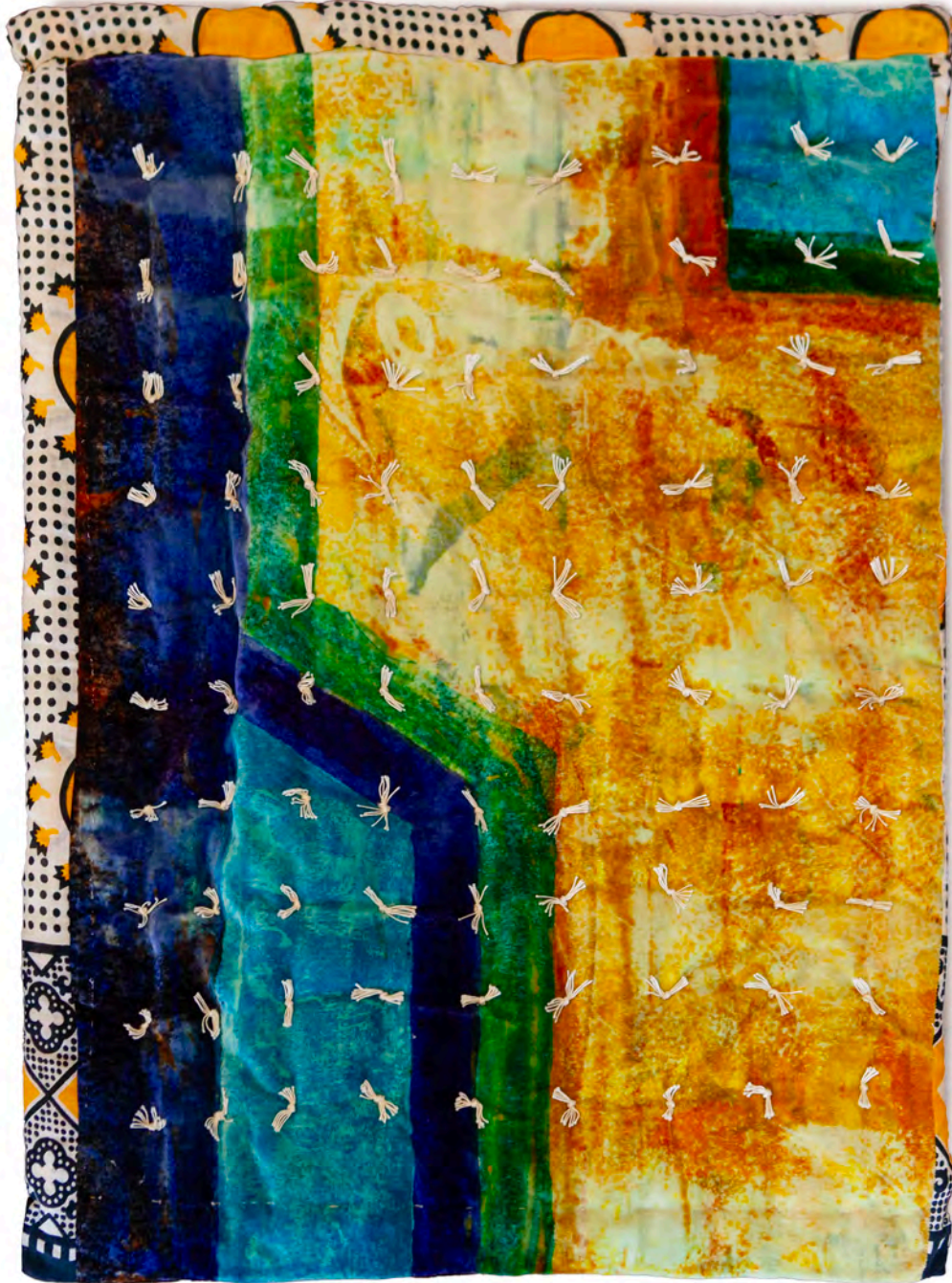


AMINA AHMED



Untitled, 1989-2023
Hand-painted velvet with procion dyes,
cross-stitched
182.8 x 129.5 cm
72 x 51 in

AMINA AHMED



Weve Na Mimi, 1989-2023

Procion dye on velvet, cotton thread, and kitenge

73.5 x 54 cm

28.9 x 21.2 in

AMINA AHMED



Amina Ahmed's thinking notebooks, Zuleikha's book of embroideries, objects of inspiration (made and found), paint palettes, art materials, sculptural notes, shell paint palettes, art materials

AMINA AHMED



I think about her hands all the time, 2019-2020

Digital video

2 minutes 10 seconds

Drawing Akin to Breath

For Amina Ahmed, the act of drawing is akin to drawing breath. ‘Drawing is when I imagine being pulled by an invisible thread being woven into the fabric of the universe,’ shares the artist. ‘The act of making has a contemplative foundation at the heart of our being.’ Amina thinks of each of her marks as both an echo of a mark that has already existed and the shadow of a mark that will come to be. Every contact of tool and paper thus connects the past, present, and future.

The cyclical nature of Amina’s art-making mirrors that of the act of breathing, or even of life itself. Amina’s invocation of breath is ever-present in her process. As she inhales, the form takes shape in her mind. As she exhales, she brings a drawing tool to paper, and the mark encounters the surface, aligning with the rhythm of her heart.

For *Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish*, her debut solo exhibition in India, Amina offers works spanning from 1989 to 2023, including small drawings on paper, site-specific drawings, and books intended to be touched. In her physical works of art, elemental materials—paper, thread, pigment, graphite—and primordial shapes—points, lines, circles, triangles, squares—coalesce into cohesive patterns that reverberate infinitely. Within each drawing, Amina gathers and layers discrete shapes and colours to form motifs that are simultaneously enigmatic and familiar.

A Ugandan-born and British-raised Turkic Indian of Nubian and Kutchi heritage, Amina utilizes the symbolic visual languages of many folk and craft traditions from around the globe to seek connection with her family history, as well as a sense of universal spirituality. Amina’s drawings are grounded in the practice of ‘geometry in nature’, which recognizes that certain patterns are omnipresent in nature and in visual culture. The markings mirror acts of preservation such as those found in nature; for example, her embossments are inspired by cast and mould fossils.

Primordial shapes—specifically the circle, the square, and triangle—form the basis of Amina’s patterns and serve as signifiers of love and human connection. These shapes appear, for example, as a circle of a fresh *roti*, hand-kneaded from a mound of dough, the line of the umbilical cord that connects a mother to a child, and the square of a handkerchief, folded into triangular halves to wipe the sweat from a loved one’s brow.

Drawing inspiration from a repository of familial memories and treasured heirlooms, Amina participates in the ongoing migration and preservation of symbols and patterns across indigenous cultures and diasporas. Her recollections of her birth mother Zuleikha and her co-mother Noor Jahan greatly shape her practice, from her choice of materials to her colour palette.

Noor Jahan had a love of fabrics. She collected various textiles from Kutch and Pakistan—*dupattas* edged with intricate lace or

emblazoned with block prints—and carried them throughout her migrations to the Congo, Kenya, and Uganda. Zuleikha was an avid embroiderer who regularly brought together women in their home. ‘It was a sanctuary for women, who would meet in our courtyard,’ reminisces Amina. They would gather to mend, weave, quilt and sew together. This space of refuge and community-building came to be known by the women as *Ma jo ghar* or ‘mother’s home.’ Thus, collection, or congregation, and memory become Amina’s refrain.

Since her mother’s passing in 2021, colour has become another corridor by which Amina transmits memory. ‘Why don’t you use colour?’ Ma asked when my works had become primarily black,’ she recalls. Recognizing experience, including the experience of colour, as a source of memory, Amina chooses colour based on her recollections. The colour palette of *Ala Bali* (2020), for example, derives from her mother’s floral embroideries, in which Zuleikha masterfully arranged hues in a dance of complementary and contrasting shades. In this work, made shortly before her mother’s passing, Amina says, ‘I revisited my promise to her to use colour and work with the colours in her embroidery. I started with her favourite colour, pink.’ *Ala Bali* fittingly means both ‘farewell’ in the Kutchi language and ‘you are on my mind’ in Arabic.

In *Ala Bali*, circles, triangles, and squares of translucent pink, orange, red, algae green, and blues warp and weft, as if woven into a prismatic labyrinth. The handmade touch is evident – Amina mixes her gum tempera, ink, and watercolours herself. The remnants of graphite marks that grid and guide the patterns invite the viewer into the unfurling process by which the work came into being. Though grief and love both nurture the works, love triumphs. The drawings are joyful and vibrant.

Ala Bali serves as a prelude to Amina’s more recent series *Circle Square Triangle Turtle Fish* (2022–23). In one drawing, saffron yellow, sunset orange, and pomegranate discs burst and radiate into a floral pattern. In another, agate green triangles border mottled purple ones, seamed together by dashed rings of ruby red. The compositions of geometry allows multiple entry and exit points for the viewer. There are organizing features – penciled lines and rays that frame or extend beyond the shapes, or inky points connecting one sequence to the next. Each drawing offers many ways to view and interpret its imagery. The longer one looks, the more one discovers pulsating patterns within patterns that evoke continuousness.

As art historian Pepe Karmel delineates in his book *Abstract Art: A Global History* (2020), every way of using a shape and colour refers to the natural world. This is resoundingly true of Amina who allows points of connection to be made across space, time, and culture. Her drawings do not attempt to define nor are they concerned with formal distillation but rather with cultural cross-fertilization and the archetypal order of nature. Amina’s invocation of symbol and memory – at once personal and beyond the personal – is ongoing, sustained like breath, as forms take shape on the visual plane.

AMINA AHMED BIOGRAPHY

Amina Ahmed (b.1964, Busembatia. Lives and works in New York) orders shape and colour in her multi-media drawings according to her principle of 'geometry in nature'. Looking to the natural environment for her visual inspiration, her patterned surfaces are reflections of the geometric sequences encountered day to day. Underpinning these repetitive and rhythmic images are both her sustained encounters with Islamic art, architecture, and ritual practice as well as her family's interest in textile cultures and her human rights activism. The beauty Ahmed achieves is motivated by her belief in its transformative powers and seeing art as a means to respond to oppressive and violent acts.

Ahmed graduated from Winchester School of Art and Chelsea School of Art. She received her MFA from the Royal College of Art, London, in 1991 where she was awarded the Barakat Trust Prize.

Ahmed's work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions, most recently at The Alexey von Schlippe Gallery of Art, Connecticut (2023); Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti, Torino (2021); Pearlstein Gallery, Drexel University, Philadelphia (2021); Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (2020); Italian Cultural Centre, New Delhi (2020); Nottingham Contemporary (2019); De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea (2019); Arnolfini, Bristol (2018-19); Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga (2019); The Showroom, London (2018); Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai (2018); Queens Museum, New York (2008).

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